"She convinced me I had Alzheimer's": Experiences of intimate partner violence in older men

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Abstract

Whilst research has explored intimate partner violence (IPV) as a social issue across the last 50 years, it is only over the last decade there has been an increase in investigating experiences of male victims. We now understand more about their experiences of physical violence, coercive control, and the impact of this victimization on both physical and mental health, however this research has typically worked with "younger" samples and there is still a dearth of literature exploring experiences of older men. The aim of the current study was to explore the experiences of men over 60 extracted from a wider data set that explored men's experience of IPV (see Author, 2019a). The narratives of eight men were analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and three master themes were extracted: their experiences of abuse behaviours, unique experiences of older men, and the impact of the abuse. Men described experiences of abuse that were comparable to that seen within younger men's narratives, but they also described age-specific experiences related to the longevity of the relationships, manipulation of finances, and exploitation of age-related cognitive decline. The results are discussed in line with the need for further research, and also a practice-based need to ensure service responses are tailored to the victim groups they are working with and moving away from a 'one size fits all' approach.

Key Words: intimate partner violence; male victims; coercive control; psychological aggression; older adults

Public Significance Statement: A novel exploration of intimate partner violence victim experiences in a group that has not previously been explored. Older men in this sample experienced significant levels of physical violence and coercive control, furthermore, they reported age specific abusive experience related to age-related cognitive decline, longevity of relationship, and financial circumstances.

Much of the existing research on intimate partner violence (IPV) has historically focused on men's violence towards women in opposite-sex relationships (e.g., Dobash & Dobash, 1979, 2004; Debbonaire & Todd, 2012), typically with a gendered, or feminist focus (George & Stith, 2014; DeKeseredy, 2011). Furthermore, there has been a focus on that which occurs in younger groups including many working with women of child-bearing age (e.g., Sullivan & Gullum, 2001) or student samples (e.g., Chan, Straus, Brownridge, Tiwari & Leung, 2008). Whilst this has been valuable in highlighting the prevalence of IPV for these groups and has contributed to our understanding of it as a social issue, it has rendered other groups to be lesser understood, including older male victims (see Carthy, Bates & Policek, 2019 for a full discussion of the need for more research on older male victims). Working inclusively to understand the similarities and differences in experiences across different victim groups is critical in ensuring service provision is appropriate and available for all.

Whilst the prevalence of aggression and violence is known to decrease with age as shown by both research (e.g., O'Leary & Woodin, 2005; Rivara et al., 2009) and crime statistics (e.g., Eisner, 2003), there are still significant numbers of men and women experiencing IPV in older age. Crime survey statistics for England and Wales in 2018 revealed that for women, the prevalence of experiencing IPV across age groups fell from 6.3% of 16-59-year olds to 2.5% of 60-74, and similarly for men it fell from 2.7% to 0.9% (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2019). This failed to additionally capture those over 75; this data is captured separately and is grouped with other wider domestic abuse behaviors (e.g., including non-partner violence). The same crime survey showed that for those over 75, the proportion of violence against the person was 28.1% for men and 38.9% for women. This data indicates that whilst there is a fall in reported victimization from 60 onwards, there are still many men and women experiencing IPV and domestic abuse in the home. This

highlights the need for these older groups to not be excluded from the data and narrative around IPV.

The above data highlights a further issue around the conflation of IPV and elder abuse (McGarry, 2008). We see within the literature that elder abuse is discussed as harm or violence by a caregiver or other person in a position of trust in varying environments (e.g., Lachs & Pillemer, 2004), which could indeed involve a partner. Similarly, other research has explored elder abuse and IPV within the same sample (e.g., Reeves, Desmarais, Nicholls & Douglas, 2007; Cooper, Selwood & Livingston, 2008). Elder abuse is a significant issue for older groups; Yon, Mikton, Gassoumis and Wilber (2017) report prevalence figures of 15.7% including ranging from 0.9% of sexual violence to 11.6% for psychological violence. Within this body of work, there is evidence of both men's victimisation (e.g., Pritchard, 2002), and the invisibility of men as victims within this age group (e.g., Kosberg, 2009). The focus within the current study is on abuse occurring between partners, and as such we present a review of the literature below that highlights the need for older men's experience of IPV to be studied.

Men and their experiences of IPV

The development of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) forty years ago was one of the first tools to highlight the prevalence of men's IPV victimization (e.g., see Archer, 2000). The wave of research that followed this challenged the current gendered models by highlighting women's propensity to be violent and controlling (e.g., Bates, Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2014), that women's violence is not always motivated by self-defence (e.g., Stets & Straus, 1989), and the prevalence of bidirectional abuse (e.g., Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Misra, Selwyn & Rohling, 2012). More recently, there has been research that has explored men's victimization in more detail; this research has revealed that

men experience significant physical abuse (e.g., Hines, Brown & Dunning, 2007), often perpetrated by women using weapons or objects (e.g., Drijber, Reijnders & Ceelan, 2013), and they experienced physical injuries (e.g., Hines & Douglas, 2010).

Previously, there had been a tendency within the IPV literature to focus on physical aggression, and specifically within literature focusing on older groups, the decline of this aggression with age. This has meant there were other forms, often more prevalent, that remained lesser understood (Straight et al., 2003). More recently this focus has changed, and indeed this has been reflected within legislation where change in the law within England and Wales has criminalised non-physical forms of abuse (see Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act, 2015; Crown Prosecution Service [CPS], 2017). Behaviors captured within the legislation include, but are not limited to, economic deprivation, threats and intimidation, degradation and isolation, control over basic freedom and everyday activities, humiliation, and manipulation (e.g., see Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2005), and figures suggest that these behaviors are perpetrated by men and women at similar rates (e.g., Bates et al., 2014; Carney & Barner, 2012). Furthermore, research that has specifically explored men's accounts has found that men experience bullying and threats (e.g., Drijber et al., 2013), gaslighting and manipulation (e.g., Author, 2019a), legal and administrative aggression (e.g., Tilbrook, Allan & Dear, 2010), and post-separation harassment and false allegations (e.g., Author, 2019c). Despite receiving less attention than physical forms of IPV, this type of abuse has been found to be more impactful (e.g., Follingstad et al., 1990) and a stronger predictor of fear (e.g. Sackett & Saunders, 1999).

The majority of this research has worked with either population-based surveys representing a range of ages (e.g., Black et al., 2011), help-seeking samples (e.g., Hines et al., 2007), or those self-identifying as victims of IPV (e.g., Hogan, 2016). Whilst this literature has contributed greatly to our understanding of men's experiences, it has mostly captured

younger men. For example, the Hines et al. (2007) study had an age range of 19-64 with a third of men between 40-49 and an average age of 41.32. Similarly, Drijber et al. (2013) reported that of their sample only 6% were over 65 and 15% were 55-64, and for Machado, Hines and Matos (2016) there was a range from 18-60 but with an average age of 33.62. For Black et al. (2011) age is only reported in that participants are over 18, and then age at time of incident is referred to. The experiences of older men are still missing within the literature; whilst it is likely that there will be overlap in experiences with younger groups, there are also likely to be age specific differences as we see within the older women's literature (e.g., Lundy & Grossman, 2009).

Older women and their experiences of IPV

Over the last two decades research exploring the prevalence and impact of IPV against older women has gained momentum (Lindbloom, Brandt, Hough & Meadows, 2007). Where we see a range of physical and non-physical forms of abuse within younger samples, the literature suggests that physical violence often reduces with an increase in psychological and controlling abuse seen in older women's narratives (Stockl, Watts & Penhale, 2012; Zink, Jacobson, Regan, Fisher & Pabst, 2006). Lazenbatt et al. (2013) argue that psychological abuse has the strongest impact on health and wellbeing due to a rise in mental health problems and substance misuse. This is also supported by research with younger victim groups (e.g., see Straight, Harper & Arias, 2003). The literature demonstrates that the consequences of IPV for younger and older victims share a number of similarities such as shame, isolation, fear, a negative impact on sense of self, and a decline in mental health. Yet, there are a number of age-specific differences in the type of abuse and effects for older female victims that differentiate the experiences of this older group. Problems with health and

well-being pose as an additional threat to older women due to increased vulnerability and decrease in opportunities to receive help and support (Nägele, Böhm, Görgen & Tóth, 2010).

Indeed, help seeking circumstances are different for older women (Lundy & Grossman, 2009) and there are a number of factors that reduce the likelihood of help seeking behaviors. Older victims are more likely to accept abusive behaviors as 'normal' (Phillips, 2000) in addition to keeping the abuse hidden (Vinton, 1992). Pispa (2004) argues that younger women are more confident in speaking out about abuse due to awareness raising campaigns mostly targeted at younger victims and children. Spouse dependency is also considered higher among older women (Beaulaurier, Seff & Newman, 2008), often due to the longer duration of older adult relationships resulting in stronger family ties (Lazenbatt, Devaney & Gildea, 2010; Tetterson & Farnsworth, 2011) and less financial independence (Band-Winterstein, 2012; Zink et al., 2003). However, the impact of abuse in newer relationships that occur later in life is also important to note (Phillips, 2000).

Where there are more barriers to help-seeking for older women, their support needs and the effectiveness of professional responses following IPV are also problematic due to the lack of service provision and professional understanding of the care needs of an older cohort (Brossoie & Roberto, 2016; Carthy & Taylor, 2018; Watson, Carthy & Becker, 2017; McGarry & Simpson, 2011). Challenges to providing support for older victims include professionals not recognising signs of abuse (Brandl, 2002; Lazenbatt, et al. 2013; Straka & Montminy, 2006; Watson, et al., 2017), and services being aimed at younger people (Perryman & Appleton, 2016). Furthermore, for older women, their only contact with services is often with general practitioners and other healthcare-based services (Flueckiger, 2008). Despite the efforts within the domestic violence and abuse literature to explore experiences of older victims, this is information is largely based on female victims of male perpetrators and less is known about male victims of female perpetrated violence.

In the existing IPV literature base we see that there are gender specific and age specific experiences across victim groups. The lack of research currently exploring older men's experiences leaves a gap in our understanding where the impact of gender and age intersect, and exploring this area could indeed reveal important distinctions that could inform practice. The aim of the current study was to explore the IPV experiences of older men. For the purpose of this study, we are defining this group as men from 60 and above, as this is a group previously excluded from crime surveys (e.g., British Crime Survey captured ages 16-59; Walby & Allen, 2004), and so their experiences are still largely not understood. This aligns with some of the older women's literature where women over 60 have been used (e.g., Policastro & Finn, 2017a; Lundy & Grossman, 2009; for 65+), but even within this population the research has included younger groups including those over 45 (Beaulaurier et al., 2007), and those over 50 (e.g., Mouton, 2003, Schaffer, 1999). The data for this study was taken from a larger sample of men aged 20 to 82 years old (M = 44; SD = 10.62) who had experienced abuse from a female partner (see Author, 2019a, 2019b). We focused on men over 60 to attempt to capture an insight into this understudied group and understand any age specific experiences men may have. We extracted men from a wider sample and explored the ways in which they experienced verbal, physical and sexual aggression, as well as their experiences of coercive control.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The data described forms a sub-group of a larger sample that has already been published (see Author, 2019a, 2019b), and includes quotes not used within those published papers. The wider data set represents a sample of 161 men with an age range of 20 to 82 (M = 44; SD = 10.62). For the analysis of the older men within this group, we extracted eight men who were all above 60 years old. They were aged between 62 and 82 years old with an

average age of 68 (SD = 6.50) and had been in a relationship for a range of 2 years to 32 years with an average of just under 14 years. All eight men had children. Men were extracted from the larger sample based on their reporting age being 60+ at the time of questionnaire completion (March-July 2017), there were no other selection criteria used.

The research project received full ethical approval through the University of Cumbria internal ethics panel. The questionnaire was advertised and shared online utilising social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook) and through organisations that are known to work with male victims of IPV (e.g. Mankind Initiative) who advertised it on their websites. Whilst the aim was to recruit UK based men, the study was shared quite widely online and so the demographic was wider than originally anticipated with respondents coming from Europe, the United States of America, and Australia. For this current sample, three men reported being from the UK (two identifying as White and one person not specifying) and five men reported being from USA (of which two described their ethnicity as White, two as Mixed and one not specifying).

Questionnaire and analysis strategy

The study utilised an anonymous online survey to protect the anonymity of the participants, something that has been found to be important for men in their help-seeking behavior (e.g., Brooks, 2019), especially because many men do not recognise themselves as victims of IPV. The questionnaire was advertised as for any man who had experienced control and aggression from a female partner, purposefully avoiding language such as "domestic violence" and "victim", but being clear that was advertised for those who had been in opposite-sex relationships. After initial demographic questions, questions were mostly qualitative in nature, and began by asking about the nature of the relationship and then asked more specifically about conflict and aggression.

The next part began to explore coercive control, including looking at the use of control of other relationships and personal freedom, financial matters, children and levels of independence. The Controlling Behavior Scale (CBS; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2005) was also utilised to give examples of control with participants being given a further opportunity to add additional examples not listed.

Participants were then specifically asked about gaslighting; the item defined the behavior before asking if it has occurred: "Gaslighting is a form of manipulation where a person seeks to sow seeds of doubt, hoping to make their partner question their own memory, perception, and sanity. It includes using persistent denial, misdirection, contradiction, and lying, in attempts to destabilise their partner and their beliefs. Can you describe whether this occurred within your relationship at all?". There was some variety in the quantity of text written by participants and by question; on the whole participants chose to write in detail about their experiences. Thematic analysis was chosen as a useful way of identifying, analysing and reporting themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006); specifically, a deductive analysis was selected with a focus on semantic themes. We focused our exploration of the data by exploring the known experiences of IPV behaviours that have been seen within the wider literature (e.g., verbal, physical and sexual abuse, coercive control/emotional and psychological abuse). We then focused on exploring experiences that were related to age and the impact of these.

Results and Discussion

Results of the thematic analysis revealed several main themes with sub themes associated. The three main themes from the analysis are: 1) Experiences of abuse behaviours; 2) unique experiences of older men; and 3) impact of abuse. There were similarities in the men's experiences that are seen in younger age groups (see theme 1 and 3), but there were also what seemed to be age specific experiences too (see theme 2).

Main theme 1: Experiences of abuse behaviours

For the men within this sample, this abuse had started within weeks or months of their relationship, for some it was when they began to live together. These experiences of abuse were comparable to those seen within the wider sample of men that this data originated from (see Author, 2019a).

Subtheme 1a: Physical and sexual aggression. As with much other research exploring men's experience of IPV, there was significant physical violence seen within their accounts:

> "…One time I'm not sure what I said, but whatever it was, she got mad at me, and hit me in the head very hard with a coffee cup - not throwing it, just sort of punching me with it. She punched me a lot…" (Participant 1)
>
> "…I was woken up by her violently pulling the covers off me and scratching and hitting me, calling me a bastard for "abandoning" her. This was one time that I ended up with quite visible injuries because she got a lot of blows and scratches in before I could curl up…" (Participant 5)
>
> "…I have had my shoulder dislocated and pulled out of socket by her. She has also locked me outside in 25 degree below zero weather for hours…" (Participant 8)

As can be seen from these participants' quotes, this was significant violence that left these men with injuries. There is often a perception that women's violence is not as impactful because of their typically lesser physical size and strength when compared to men, in contrast the experiences described were injurious, serious, and seemed to represent a pattern of violence.

When asked if they had ever used physical aggression towards their partner six of the eight men said they never had; they described instead trying to flee the violence:

"…I never defended myself other than by running away, backing away, and covering my head with my arms and hands…" (Participant 1)

"…I tried to walk away, but this only made her angrier…" (Participant 5)

The two men who said they had, when asked to describe did not describe incidents of physical aggression, but more restraint and self-defence:

"…I did defend myself. I took a deadly weapon from her, twice…" (Participant 4)

"…To restrain her from harming herself or me. I'm not sure that's aggression…" (Participant 7)

In additional to this physical violence, there was also sexual aggression experienced:

"…force-fed me viagra by shoving her fist into my mouth. She then gagged me by shoving her knickers into my mouth and gaffer taping my mouth shut…" (Participant 5)

This description constitutes an example of sexual torture around being forced to penetrate his female partner. The law within the UK does not allow for a man to be raped by a woman due to the language around penetration with a penis, but previous literature has indicated that there can be an overlap with physical and sexual victimization, for example, Hines and Douglas (2016) found that 28% of their male IPV help-seeking sample had experienced severe sexual aggression. There is still significant stigma associated with men's victimization more generally, but this is especially the case for their sexual victimization from women, thought to be linked to their size and strength (Weare, 2017), and also inaccurate assumptions about men physically not being able to be forced to have sex with a woman (Weare, 2018).

We know from the research and crime statistics that IPV and violence generally tends to reduce over time with age. For example, Mezey, Post and Maxwell (2002) found that physical abuse tends to peak around 32 and then starts to decline. This is often thought to be

in favour of other non-direct strategies (e.g., Walker & Richardson, 1998). For the men within this sample, they were describing significant physical aggression that would have likely resulted in injury and in some cases the need for medical intervention.

We see within the accounts of younger men that there is significant physical violence that often causes serious and life-threatening injuries, it can be seen here that despite being in this older age group, that this violence seemed to be as severe as that experienced by younger men. Furthermore, and again similar to younger men's experiences, the nature of this physical violence often occurred when these men were asleep or more vulnerable. Crime statistics and aggression questionnaires show a decrease in aggression with age (e.g., Daly & Wilson, 1990; Eisner, 2003; O'Leary, 2006); indeed, the most recent figures from the Office for National Statistics indicates that 0.9-2.5% of over 60s experienced IPV compared to 2.7-6.3% of those 16 to 59 (ONS, 2019). The narratives of the men within this older sample indicate that their experiences of violence were still significant, whilst this survey was non-targeted and so we cannot be sure this whether this violence had decreased over time, if it had, it was still serious and potentially injurious. This was comparable to the experiences of men within the wider sample this data originated from (see Author, 2019a). The men within the wider sample reported physical violence (e.g., punching, slapping, kicking and use of objects as weapons such as TV remotes and ornaments) and sexual violence (e.g., being forced to penetrate their partner).

Subtheme 1b: Coercive Control. The men's accounts also included significant levels of coercive control. This could be seen in different types of behavior, but often included reference to unpredictability and the need for their partner to always be in control:

"…Unpredictable - sometimes extra nice, sometimes abusive…" (Participant 5)

> "…Controlling she had to be in control no matter what irrespective of what I tried to do…" (Participant 2)

For some of the men, they described the way they had become isolated from friends, family and in some cases their adult children:

> "…She didn't like any of my children calling to check on me, and made excuses why I couldn't talk whenever they'd call. Visits were not possible, whenever they would talk about visiting, she'd make an excuse that we would be gone on some vacation or something..." (Participant 1)

For others, it was a close monitoring of any of their communication channels in a way that limited their choice and personal freedom to maintain outside relationships with friends and family:

> "…She searched my computer and phone for evidence of betrayal…" (Participant 4)

The nature of these forms of non-physical abuse represents similar experiences to those seen in younger men. The prevalence of coercive control (or psychological and emotional abuse, as overlapping terms) is seen within both younger men and women's accounts; it is more common than physical abuse (e.g., Panuzio & DiLillo, 2010), and has more of an impact on victims including longer lasting adverse outcomes (e.g., Follingstad et al., 1990). Though other literature suggests that some types of coercion are experienced less by older groups for example, Policastro and Finn (2017a) found older people (regardless of gender) experienced less surveillance or intimidation than the younger groups.

In younger samples one mechanism we have seen that women use to exert control over men is their children; for example, Hines et al. (2007) reported that over half of the men in their sample reported that fear of losing their children was the key reason they stayed in their abusive relationships. Similarly, Author (2019c) saw post-separation abuse through false allegations and alienating behavior designed to disrupt the parental relationship. Where the

participants in the current study were older, and so as a consequence their children were older, this did not prevent them being part of a wider pattern of coercion with men reporting becoming isolated from their adult children.

The literature also discusses the ways that older women have been impacted by coercive and controlling behavior. Beaulaurier et al. (2008) argue that internal and external barriers to help-seeking are impacted by the abuser's behaviors; psychological tactics presented by abusers can play a pivotal role in the victims' sense of self, which can create internal barriers to seeking support. Psychological abuse has been found to have a strong negative impact on health and well-being among the older female victims of IPV (Beaulaurier, et al., 2008). Indeed, we know that where physical abuse may decline with age (e.g., Mezey et al., 2002), psychological abuse does not, and may even escalate (e.g., Zink et al., 2006).

Carthy et al. (2019) have highlighted that older men fall within an intersectionally hidden victim group; men's experiences have been lesser focused on compared to women, and further older people have received less research attention compared to younger people. Only recently, in the UK, was coercive and controlling behavior legislation added to the Serious Crime Act (2015), therefore many older adults may not consider such behaviors as abuse. It is important that psychological and coercive behaviors are conceptualised as abuse by both the professionals and the public so that older generations are able to identify that non-physical abusive behaviors in the absence of physical violence. Furthermore, although researchers have examined barriers to justice for both women (e.g. Hawkins & Laxton, 2014) and men (McCarrick et al., 2016) less is known about specific challenges for older adults.

Main Theme 2: Unique experiences of older men

Sub-theme 2a: Abuse related to age*:* Within the men's descriptions of physical aggression and coercive control, there were clear themes of experiences that were more unique to them due to their age. For one man, his partner had tried to manipulate him into believing he had dementia:

> "…She convinced me I had Alzheimer's and tried to force me to sign a legal paper to declare me incompetent..." (Participant 1)

Whilst many men in younger samples give examples of ways in which their partners manipulate and control their life, this is an example that can only be effective in older populations and demonstrates a tactic to attempt to get a powerful and legal form of control.

Other men described financial abuse that was again unique to this age group, due in part to the longevity of their relationship, for example Participant 3 described this abuse occurring over several decades:

> "…Forty (40) years of verbal/mental, physical, and property abuse…It never changed and in fact became worse until she divorced me..." (Participant 3)

The same participant described the way in which his partner only left after she learned she could take a significant proportion of his pension regardless of whether she moved on and remarried:

> "…My X finally divorced me when she learned she could have 50% of my military pension which in the USA she will continue to collect until one of us is dead, and she will collect it even if she remarries..." (Participant 3)

For another participant, he described a purposeful action of his ex-partner to target specifically older men as part of a financial scam:

> "…I need to tell you this relationship was a bait and switch...her and her best friend who work in the insurance industry decided to find old men who had illnesses and

insure them and support them partially until we died and then cash in on insurance..." (Participant 8)

These tactics of abuse described were unique to this age group and at least to some extent, represented an instrumental strategy to enable abuse and manipulation. As adults age, research suggests they adapt their aggressive strategies to develop those that are more indirect through the development of increased self-regulation, and better developed social and verbal skills (e.g., Walker & Richardson, 1998). Where men described in the first Master theme their experience of coercive and controlling behavior, this sub theme reveals where this control has been adapted to age related factors such as the potential for declining cognition and greater financial security. Walker and Richardson (1998) explain that older adults have better control over inhibiting their impulses; this control allows the use of higher order cognitive processes necessary for using indirect aggressive strategies.

We know that the duration and type of abuse experienced by older women is often different compared to younger women (e.g., Blood, 2004), and similarly there are gender specific differences in some experiences of IPV within younger groups such as legal and administrative aggression being more uniquely experienced by men (Tilbrook et al., 2010). The experiences described here by older men, may indeed be unique to this group.

Sub-theme 2b: Longevity of experience and abuse. For other men, their age and the length of their relationship meant they had experienced abuse over longer time periods than men who are comparatively younger. One participant described attending marriage counselling in an attempt to help the relationship, but it seems despite his wife's abusive behavior, his IPV victimization was never recognised:

"…We had many years of marital counselling and not once did a counsellor suggest that I was a victim of DV. My wife also abused the children which I never learned

about until my youngest daughter was a teen and she told me about it..." (Participant 3)

For another participant, he described the longevity of the relationship that has included separation and being reunited several times:

"…We divorced twice..." (Participant 6)

The UK based male victim's charity ManKind Initiative (2019) describe statistics from their helpline data that indicate men are often abused for three years before seeking help. For the men within this sample, they had experienced abuse over a significant period of time, and this has contributed to their wider victimization and impact. From the above example, professionals had failed to recognise the his experience as IPV, we see generally women's perpetration of violence is not perceived to be as serious or as in need of intervention as men's (e.g., Seelau, Seelau & Poorman, 2003; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005) and male victims are often blamed more for their experiences (e.g., Taylor & Sorenson, 2005). We further see abuse as lesser recognised in older populations due to the changes from physical to more psychological/emotional patterns, and indeed, Carthy and Holt (2016) highlight the need for service providers and professionals working with IPV victims to recognise and meet the needs of older adults. This includes reflecting the age specific experience, and in the case of the current study, the age and gender specific experiences of victims.

Main theme 3: Impact of abuse

Sub-theme 3a: Impact on mental health. This group of older men described the impact their victimization had on their mental wellbeing:

"…I also know that I was close to suicide and I lost a few male friends to suicide and a couple of my friends' male parents did too. I think men blame themselves if their lives are not good…" (Participant 6)

Participant 6 describes the impact on his own mental health and feeling close to taking his own life as well as knowing that this had happened to people he knew. For other participants they felt they were under the control of their ex-partner and the detrimental impact this had:

> "…I am still being controlled: the flashbacks are worse than I can describe, especially the physical ones, I can't achieve orgasm (referral to psychosexual specialist didn't help), a lot of the time I feel hopeless and worthless and without a future. I am also living in poverty and with the constant fear of becoming homeless..." (Participant 5)

This was one of many references to the financial impact on men within this sample, another participant said:

> "…I cannot afford to go anywhere, I'm in my 60's…am very ill and I only get a small retirement…" (Participant 8)

The impact of financial stress at an older age is likely to adversely impact health and wellbeing, and exacerbate the effects of their victimization. As this participant identifies, as an older man he feels his options are limited in terms of relocating or seeking further employment; indeed, older populations may have fewer options after the break down of a relationship and this will be exacerbated by their abusive experiences.

For another participant, he took solace in his relationship with his children:

> "…I understand so much more now, and I am grateful for my children, who saved my life and my sanity. I'm the luckiest man in the world..." (Participant 1)

It is positive that this participant has such a strong relationship with his children. One of the most commonly cited reasons for men not leaving their abusive relationship is their children (e.g., Hines & Douglas, 2010), this was seen within one participant's narrative in this current sample:

> "…I didn't leave because of my religious beliefs and for my children..." (Participant 3)

For some men, leaving an abusive relationship can sometimes mean losing contact with their children or having that relationship manipulated in some way. Within this current sample, this was not described as a reason to stay in their relationships; it is possible that this is less of an issue within an older sample due to the relative older age of their children meaning they are less able to be manipulated. However, as seen above, adult children were still used as a means for control with one a discussing the way his partner had isolated him from them.

These findings mirror some in the older women's literature that demonstrate the higher rates of anxiety and depression, as well as health problems and alcohol dependence in older women (e.g., Wolkenstein & Sterman, 1998; Lazenbatt, Devaney & Gildea, 2013). Similarly, within the younger men's literature, IPV has been found to have long term adverse impact on physical and mental health for men (e.g. Coker, Smith, Bethea, King & McKeown, 2000; Coker et al., 2002) and is associated posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; e.g., Hines & Douglas, 2011).

Non-physical forms of abuse are often known to be the most impactful (e.g., Straight et al., 2003). For example, within a group of younger women, Sacket and Saunders (1999) found it correlated with depression. Seff, Beaulaurier and Newman (2008) found many older women recognised the outcomes associated with non-physical abuse but also believed many women would not acknowledge the severity of this type of abuse, discussing possible generational issues. Whilst the introduction of new legislation criminalising their type of abuse in the absence of physical violence may have had some effect on this, it is possible this still remains a barrier for this group.

Sub-theme 3b: Perceptions of their experiences. Six of the eight men in the sample had confided in either friends or family, police or other services. Their descriptions of the

response to their disclosure was not positive and this seemed to exacerbate the impact of the abuse in some cases. For example, one participant said:

> "…They don't want to know about it, don't want to be involved.... Especially family. Other friends when we show them documents they are in total disbelief that it has happened..." (Participant 2)

This mirrors the responses of other samples of male victims who describe being laughed at, not being believed or not being taken seriously (e.g., see Author, 2019b; for further discussion). Indeed, another participant described not only not being believed, but actually being blamed for trying to seek police help:

> "…I just wasn't believed about the abuse. And even after she was arrested for attacking me, I was still not believed and in fact I was condemned for having my X-wife arrested..." (Participant 3)

There are many barriers that exist to men being able to seek help and report their experiences of IPV, the fear of not being believed and of being laughed at is a common one seen within men's accounts (e.g., Author, 2019b). For older populations, it is possible that additional barriers are created due to the generational and traditional gender values that influence the social expectations (Band-Winterstein, 2012), and that the stronger patriarchal norms could contribute to the difficulty men, in particular, face in reporting their victimization (Douglas & Hines, 2011).

Implications and future directions

The aim of this study was to explore the IPV experiences of a sub-group of older men within a wider sample of men who had experienced abuse; this included exploring their experiences of verbal, physical and sexual aggression, as well as their experiences of coercive control and financial manipulation. Men's experiences of IPV have been seen through the use

of crime surveys that have demonstrated prevalence (e.g., Black et al., 2011), survey methods such as the CTS (e.g., Archer, 2000; Bates et al., 2014), and through qualitative research (e.g., Hogan, 2016). Official statistics reveal around one in three victims of IPV are male (see ONS, 2019); prevalence is seen to be higher within the literature that utilises self-report tools suggesting the proportion of male victims could be even higher. These men often face barriers in help-seeking and reporting which likely renders official sources an underestimate (e.g., Author, 2019b).

Despite the growing research attention paid to male victim samples with lower average ages (e.g., Hines et al., 2007; Hogan, 2016), and older women (e.g., Beaulaurier et al., 2007), older men remain a largely hidden victim group within both research and practice. The findings of this study revealed significant experience of aggression and control similar to those seen within younger samples, but there were also age specific differences seen. Men described abuse that included reference to age-related cognitive decline, manipulation of pensions and finances, and the longevity of the relationships and experiences. This abuse was also seen to have a significant impact on the men in this sample in terms of their feelings of ongoing control, their mental wellbeing, financial stability, and a lack of support from services when they attempted to seek help.

In the wider literature, when exploring women's experiences, studies have typically focused on working with "younger" women who are of child bearing age (Sullivan & Gullum, 2001), and when literature has worked with older women, we see there are age specific experiences and barriers to help-seeking. For example, women describe protecting the family unit and their relationships with adult children (Beaulaurier et al., 2005), the normalisation of multi-generational abuse (e.g., Lazenbatt et al., 2013), being raised in an era of traditional gender values (e.g., Band-Winterstein, 2012), and a lack of age appropriate resources (e.g., Paranjape et al., 2007). Within the current study, men were not specifically

asked about barriers to help-seeking but there were some of these factors mirrored in the men's accounts. For example, the men described the financial impact of their experience that would have likely formed a barrier to leaving; similarly, they described responses from friends and family not being supportive.

Research with older women (e.g., see Beaulaurier et al., 2007) describes the responses received from others as being a significant barrier, this did indeed include the fear of not being believed or being laughed at by those within the criminal justice system. This is something similarly described by older men within the current study but is also seen more widely in the wider male victim literature, and is something that younger men have also described. For example, men within Author (2019c) described the ways in which false allegations had been used by their female ex-partners to further manipulate and control them post-separation. This threat of, and indeed actual use of these allegations, was a significant barrier experienced by men in terms of being able to access support. Work that has explored barriers to reporting and asking for help in a non-help-seeking sample has further revealed the impact of gender and how this is seen within the language and culture of both policy and legislation, and in systems and practices (see Taylor, Bates, Colosi & Creer, 2020). Specifically considering the impact on older men, it could be that traditional gender roles and this patriarchal construction goes some way towards explaining why men find it difficult to come forward to disclose victimization (Douglas & Hine, 2011), as well as being related to wider help-seeking issues experienced by men (e.g., Addis & Mahalik, 2003). For example, research suggests that men who adhere to rigid traditional gender norms have been found to under use mental health services and report negative attitudes around help-seeking (McKelley, 2007). Related to IPV, stereotypes around masculinity dictate that men should be powerful and able to protect themselves (Rentoul & Appleboom, 1997), so whilst the label of

victim has implications for being able to identify and access support, it can also construct individuals as weak, passive and trapped (Overstreet & Quinn, 2013).

It is key that we understand and recognise the similarities and differences that are likely to occur across victim experiences; this includes recognising the gender and age specific differences that exist. Policastro and Finn (2017a) found older people experiences less intimidation and surveillance type behaviors than younger people, but that men overall reported more surveillance behaviors compared to women, and younger women experienced more intimidation compared to younger men. This study highlights that whilst there is significant overlap in terms of the IPV behaviors that can be experienced by victims, there are also likely to be differences that are important to understand if we are to effectively help and support these groups. This is especially true when some figures from the academic literature suggest men are as likely as women to experience abuse whether from typically younger (e.g., Archer, 2000) or older groups (Policastro & Finn, 2017b).

Concluding Thoughts

There are some limitations associated with this study. Firstly, it has utilised data that was not gathered through purposeful recruitment of older men, and so the questions were not tailored specifically to trying to capture the IPV experiences of this group. It reports on a small sub-sample of a wider group of men who disclosed their IPV experiences, and one possible avenue to explore this issue further could be to create a survey that specifically targets older men, including reference to some of the age specific findings seen here. Secondly, the recruitment strategy meant the survey was mainly advertised through social media and online sources for help-seeking agencies. Whilst there is certainly an increase in older groups using the Internet (Sum, Mathews, Pourghasem & Hughes, 2009), there is likely still to be some of the older members of this group who do not engage with some elements of

social media (Mazur, Signorella & Hough, 2019), and so the sample captured will still be biased in favour of those who do. Therefore, future research should consider opportunities to gather a wider sample of older men via more traditional media outlets such as, newspaper advertisements and organisations supporting these groups.

Whilst there are barriers that exist for victims in help-seeking, some of the barriers that prevent effective service provision also includes the perceptions of practitioners (e.g., Watson et al., 2017); the findings of the current study point to a need to ensure we work to challenge and change public and professional attitudes around the nature of IPV. We know from the existing literature working with older adults that there are barriers to practitioner intervention. Whilst it is key that service providers and professionals are able to recognise the signs of abuse within older adult populations (Carthy & Holt, 2016), many therapists feel a "helplessness" when it comes to knowing how to support older adults that often leads to avoidance of asking about any suspected abuse (Watson, et al., 2017). It is possible this is even more so the case for older men due to the lack of knowledge within the societal discourse around abuse. It is crucial we work with these older groups for domestic abuse in particular due to the higher chances for repeat victimization compared to other types of crime (Walby & Allen 2004). Within the UK, funding cuts have meant service providers are left looking for cost effective strategies, which sometimes means a 'one size fits all approach', but this lacks the specialist and tailored provision that is important to ensure effective victim support (Towers & Walby, 2012). There is a need for further targeted research to be done before more evidence informed recommendations can be made.

Indeed, current IPV interventions in terms of both perpetrator and victim support continue to be shaped by gendered models that focus on men's violence towards women, and have typically worked with younger groups (see Bates, Graham-Kevan, Bolam & Thornton, 2017 for a full discussion around current interventions in the UK). As a consequence, the

majority of the financial investment goes to funding services that address men's perpetration and support female victims (Author, 2019a), and those which are typically likely to work with younger age groups (e.g., supporting younger women escape with their children). The wider male victim literature supports the need to increase provision and resources for men, but the results of the current study, along with wider literature on older women's experiences, support the need to ensure older victim groups are also receiving tailored support. If we work inclusively within the research to explore the experiences of all victim groups, we are then able to ensure this tailored support is informed by evidence-based practice.

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